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# MAKING DREAMS

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer

It doesn't take a genius to see that Shaun Simpson is a late bloomer. Despite going into the 2009 MX2 championship as one of the favorites to win the title, he came up well short and since that 2009 season it's been a slow building process. His first GP victory at Lierop in 2013 saw the potential finally coming through, and then wins in Lommel and Assen last year the career build on consistent results, seemed to be heading in the right direction.









The 2016 pre-season and Simpson has been one of the form riders, winning the MX1 overall in both Hawkstone Park and Valence, and showing maybe the best speed of his long career. Now heading into the opening round of the FIM Motocross World Championship the Scotsman is confident of some major points, and is even looking at the very top of the GP tree, World Motocross Champion.

“Basically, all I want to do is better myself, and looking at my 2015 season, all things considered, I am going to have to be doing pretty damn well. I just try and worked on my weak points in the winter time and just try and improve and that is my main goal for the season and last year I was fourth in the championship. So I need to look at second or third, but the ultimate goal for everyone is to be world champion, and I think I am in there with a shout. I am excited at the prospect at that at the moment and I feel so comfortable on the bike and the pace I am riding. This is only the first race of the season, but it does give you an indication where your speed is at. The boxes are getting ticked at the moment and I just













need to keep it on two wheels and make no mistakes before the main race in Qatar in a weeks' time."

A week or so ago in Valence, France all didn't go to plan leading into the event, but still Simpson came through with flying colors.

"What a weekend we had. We packed up the camper and headed to the race only to discover when we were near Luxembourg that there were flames flicking up from the driver's foot-well! We had to call the fire brigade and had it towed back while we were able to carry on to Valence. It was a full night shift to drive there and then we had to sleep in the van before warm-up on Saturday. There had been rain but the track was not nearly as bad as I thought it would be, the sun was out and

I felt good, setting the fastest time. In the second session I was third but only something like 0.3 of a second from first."

"My speed was obviously there after practice," he says. "I had a good start in the first moto and was fourth or fifth but by the time I was up to third it was already too late to catch [Kevin] Strijbos and [Clement] Desalle. I got a better start in the second race and almost had the holeshot but Desalle went wide and slingshot around the first corner. He basically led from start-to-finish, I tried a few moves to pass him but couldn't make it happen and took a solid second."

"The Superfinal was quite exciting. I got the holeshot and Desalle was hounding me. The track was quite one-line but not too bad, it was alright for racing. He then over-jumped quite badly and it seems like he's broken his arm. Townley was pressurizing me for a while but then – I think – Jeffrey [Herlings] took him out and I made a mistake on the very last lap going to the

finish that let him beat me; I wasn't too happy with that but to take my second overall win in the MX1 class was good."

Simpson knows that the opening GP of the season in Qatar won't be as easy as his wins in Hawkstone Park and Valence, and his eyes are more set on being consistent and picking up a bunch of points than walking away with victory.

"I think it is excitement, and it's still very unknown. We have had some pre-season races, but not everyone has raced each other. It will come down to who brings their A-Game to Qatar. I mean some won't be mentally strong, some guys have some silly little injuries and you just need to stay focused and believe in yourself and I know if I turn up with what I have to give I will be there or there about. Look at these top guys and even the guys in America, look at James Stewart, everyone thought he would dominate, but he's just had so many problems. I mean if you tried to pick the top five from Qatar you could be totally wrong. The younger guys from MX2, these guys are going to be interesting. I just try and concentrate on myself and I am not a spring chicken anymore and I know it's not just about Qatar or Thailand. You need to be there every single weekend, and that is what pays off and I am looking at the long haul."







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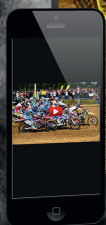
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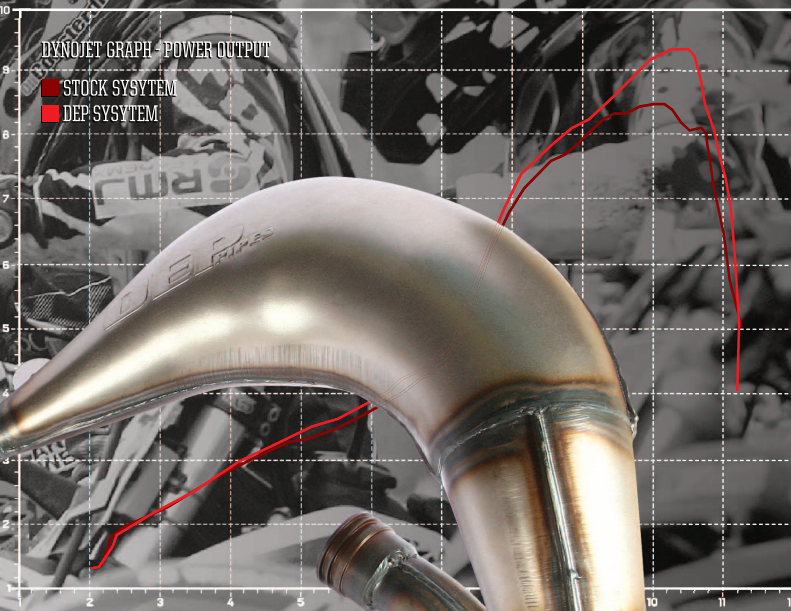


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# THE RETURN OF BEN TOWNLEY

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer

If you mentioned the name Ben Townley back in 2005, you were talking about the hottest rider on the world scene. He was adored in Europe and was making the big move to race the AMA Supercross and Motocross Championships. It was a move that saw him gain fans, but no major titles. He did pick up a 250cc Supercross title, but compared to his MX2 title, and the titles he really wanted that indoor championship wasn't in the same league.

Now back in Europe to try and become the 2016 FIM World MXGP champion Townley is focused on one thing, and that is to make sure he ends the season healthy and with another world title to his name.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Obviously when you raced here in the early 2000's Stefan Everts was a major part of your learning process. How important is he in your return?

**Townley:** It's the biggest part of my reason for being here, and part of Suzuki. There are three key staff members at Suzuki that I believe can help me, and offer me the best advice there is in the paddock. Starting with Stefan, I have a good relationship with him. He stopped racing a long time ago, and he has worked with some young guys at KTM. If will be different, I am 31 and a work in progress, some things won't change for me, but other things I want to work on and I need to. With Sylvain, he is synonymous with this brand really isn't he. He has a lot of experience with the bike and somebody I will rely on to help with my set-up. Then there is Harry and he has seen everything and can help me with my riding. The team also has a lot of experience technicians and I believe this is the best spot for me.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Kevin and yourself couldn't be more different. You are intense and want to win every time out and Kevin is more relaxed and maybe reserved. Stefan mentioned you guys want to help each other. Do you think maybe you can learn from each other; it is like if you combined you two that that would be the perfect competitor.

**Townley:** No, it's not something we have thought about, but as a team with the new structure and what Stefan has set out as the goals for the team, I think it's working really well. We spent a couple of weeks in Spain together and it worked out really well, and I expect that to continue throughout the season.

**Motocross Illustrated:** You are somebody who wants to win all the time and it hasn't always been a positive for you. Have you looked at how you want to go into the season, those first few rounds?

**Townley:** Absolutely, it is something we have looked at and we started on it a long time ago. It was one of the first things we discussed. Regards to the first couple of rounds, actually the first five rounds, we have set some goals, for those fly away races. Being realistic and building a good platform and building a good base for the season and make sure one foot goes before the other. Clearly from the Motocross of Nations it isn't about the speed, but getting the whole program together.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Looking at Ryan (Villopoto) last year. He started slow, then got that awesome win in Thailand, but he really struggled, it wasn't that easy. Did you learn anything from that?

**Townley:** I haven't learnt anything from his racing, probably more about his pre-season and build-up, there was a lot to learn from that. You have to be in touch with the European way and not expect to bring anything to the table, especially for me, with what I have been doing. Clearly these guys know what they are doing and I need to listen to them and they can help me get set-up as best as possible.









They had Clement last year and he had the red-plate, so they know what they are doing.

**Motocross Illustrated:** That slowing down to be more conservative, that is obviously a mental thing, is that going to be part of the battle to tell yourself to slow down, you don't have to win this thing every time out?

**Townley:** As I mentioned, we have started working on that and applying that to my practicing. It's quiet interesting the comments you make about my racing, because you would have to look pretty hard to find a video of me racing and getting injured in a race, and I am sure you will find it's never happened. A lot has to do with away from the races, clearly when I have been behind the gate I have done well. The biggest problem has been getting to the gate and that is a lot of what we are working on. I haven't raced an entire season since 2010 and a little in 2011 and a tiny bit in 2012, and I didn't race in 2013, and 2014 and then the end of 2015. It's about me getting my feet wet again and doing it in a measured approach. It's going to be fun for me going to these International races and I am excited about the travel and going to these countries. It will be all new to me.

**Motocross Illustrated:** I love the first part of the season, going to Qatar where everyone is really chilled out and it's nearly like we are all on holidays together, then going to Thailand where the culture is really different and exciting. Obviously when you raced in America it was pretty much of the same wherever you went. Do you think that is more interesting now, being that you are over 30 and might see things differently?

**Townley:** For sure, I am looking forward to the culture and experience. I think a lot of people in the paddock might not like the travel, but I am used to it, I come from the furthest away point on the planet to be here, so I don't mind the travel and at the age I am I am really looking forward to soaking it up. When I was young I didn't care about the old buildings and the food. It comes with age I guess.

**Motocross Illustrated:** I read some-









where that you missed your family as soon as you arrived in Europe. How difficult is that?

**Townley:** That is tough, it's the hardest part for me. The fact I have to be away from them, it's such a wonderful time with young kids, and even though the world is so much smaller now with all the skype and whatever else, it's still difficult and it doesn't allow you to experience the things you do on a daily basis. It is a busy time of the year which helps, with testing and riding. I won't hide it it's the hardest part for sure. I get to go home for a week after Thailand, then after Valkenswaard, I go back between that and Argentina, then when we get back from Mexico they are coming here anyway. I am really looking forward to being a family again until the end of the season.

**Motocross Illustrated:** You and Josh used to live together in that house in Belgium. Have you driven past that old house much?

**Townley:** Yes, a few times, times have changed haven't they. Life goes and that was a great time in my life. It is funny I know this area pretty well and it is easy to fit back in.

**Motocross Illustrated:** It's a great calendar in 2016, with some nice overseas races and obviously two rounds in America. Is there anything you are really looking forward to this year?

**Townley:** I wouldn't say there is one track I am looking forward to. I would have preferred to go back to Isle of Wight in England, I loved that track. More than anything I am excited about the spectators and the atmosphere. I mean St Jean in France with the spectators on the bank, I am looking forward to Talavera and I really want to be part of Team New Zealand at Maggiora, I have never been to those two famous tracks. I am generally just looking forward to the Grand Prix's, it's a great atmosphere and a big build-up. We arrive on Friday and don't really race until Sunday afternoon. It's a different type of a racing scene compared to America with a one-day format and it's just wide open on the Saturday and racing in Australia is similar to America. I am going to enjoy that experience. My mum and dad will be travelling with me the whole season in Europe and I look forward to that.









# CONTENDERS

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer and Acevedo J.P.

While we are seeing some pre-season injuries, the 2016 MXGP championship still looks like a pretty deep series for rider quality. Antonio Cairoli crashed in a practice accident and broke some ribs, Romain Febvre crashed after a false start in a race in Italy and received a severe gash in his arm, Clement Desalle crashed while over jumping a jump and broke his arm, Pauls Jonass injured a thumb in a practice crash, Rui Goncalves injured a thumb in the same start crash as Febvre, Jordi Tixier has been suffering from a wrist injury from 2015 and had surgery to correct the problem, and the list goes on and on.









The good news is many riders haven't suffered injury and fortunately many of the riders carrying injury will be racing in Qatar on February 27.

You don't need to be a rocket scientist to see that Evgeny Bobryshev, Shaun Simpson, and Jeremy Van Horebeek, have been stand-outs in the pre-season races.

Not surprisingly Bobryshev and Simpson enjoyed consistent results in 2015 and Simpson and Van Horebeek has always been known for consistent results in their careers. It is consistency that will win this year's MXGP title, and these three guys at present look like being near the top of the early season results. But there are so many more.

Of the 25 or so entered in the MXGP class 18 have a GP win or more against their name.

So let us look at the 10 riders who we think will shine in the MXGP class in Qatar.

**Romain Febvre:** The defending MXGP champion and a rider who showed in 2015 that he is a little special. His performances in the races he did finish in the pre-season showed that form hasn't gone away. The Frenchman has Cairoli like smarts in his race craft, taking his time, and pushing when it counts. It would be a brave man to bet against the defending champion, but as we saw in 2015, don't ever expect the expected.

**Antonio Cairoli:** He is probably still the king of the MXGP class, but the doubts about his future continue. Is he too old, have we seen the last of his brilliance? Up until 2014 he was the man, no doubt about it, but in 2015 he didn't look the same rider early in the season, then an arm injury took him right out of the picture. His competition had been slowly edging closer to him, but he is still if not the greatest GP rider of all time, a very close second to Stefan Everts. You can never count out a rider of the stature of Cairoli, and if he won again in 2016, not too many people would be surprised.

**Gautier Paulin:** In 2015 many expected the HRC backed rider to claim his first world title. He had come off winning the last GP of the 2014 season and then dominated the world's best at the MXoN in Latvia. Talent wise he is the real deal, as he has shown on different occasions









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in the MXGP series and the MXoN performances. His problem, just like Clement Desalle has been being consistent. In 2015 despite an injury he was one of the most consistent rider and while he didn't gel well with the Honda, he finished second in the world. In 2016 HRC have worked overtime to give him the bike he wants, and his move to train with Aldon Baker in America is something that shows just how motivated he is to be world champion.

**Clement Desalle:** With 19 GP wins he is the second most successful GP winner in the MXGP class behind King Cairoli. He has been the toughest competitor for the Italian, but hasn't been able to match the consistency of Cairoli. A change to the Monster Energy Kawasaki team seemed to be the right change at the right time, and we all looked forward to seeing his form in the green team. As good as he has been, his injury tally isn't helping his cause. Again injured last weekend, the Belgian looks like he will miss out again in 2016. Time is running out for the man who made his GP debut 10 years ago in 2006.

**Ben Townley:** The New Zealander is a question mark no doubt about it. His speed at the MXoN in Ernee was great, but a single weekend doesn't count for anything if you can't make a full season. Townley with the help of his mentor of the 2004 and 2005 season Stefan Everts will be motivated there is no doubt about that. He works as hard as anyone, and has shown in the past his talent is unquestioned. I can't think of anyone who wouldn't be happy to see him succeed where he has failed in the past. Injuries have followed him, and if you had to bet your house on Townley to finish the year healthy, you would get pretty good odds from the bookmaker.

**Max Nagl:** Remember this guy? Probably the favorite to win the MXGP championship after half a dozen races in 2015. Unfortunately, like so many others his season ended in the back of an ambulance. Nagl has been around for a long time, he has paid his dues, and deserved some luck. He will have his moments in 2016, just as he did in 2015, and with the help of his Rockstar Husqvarna Factory team you can be sure he will be there a bout at seasons end.


**Evgeny Bobryshev:** Don't count out the











big Russian. Third in the world in 2015 and on a bit of a roll in the pre-season races. Bobby is probably riding better than any time in his career, and he has also matured as a racer. Gone is the wild rider who went out on a stretcher on many occasions, and replaced by the sensible father, who wants more than anything to continue his climb up the rankings. I wouldn't think he will be world champion in 2016, but if he is fit at the end of the season, then anything is possible.

**Tim Gajser:** Another Honda rider, and a young kid with more talent than most. The MX2 world champion is said to be loving his 450 machine, and if talking to the HRC people is anything to go by, then Gajser wants world title number two and he wants it this year. A beautiful riding style and one that will suit the bigger bike. Does he need to learn to control the pace of the race though, as the bigger, more powerful bike might be a little too much at times. We will tell you in September.

**Shaun Simpson:** Another dark horse. Similar to Bobryshev the Scotsman has been in brilliant form of late. He has a couple of GP wins to his name, but the improvement in 2015 was huge, and going by the opening few pre-season races that improvement has continued. Help from the KTM factory, and that self-belief that he can be world champion might make for a massive shock in 2016. Wouldn't that be something, Shaun Simpson the first British world champion in 15 years.

**Jeremy Van Horebeek:** Another Belgian in the group, and for sure a rider with a lot to prove in 2016. His 2014 form was brilliant, consistent podium finishes and second in the world, but 2015 was the total opposite. His pre-season form has been good, picking up the Italian Motocross championship and a handful of moto wins. He had to sit back and watch his rookie team-mate win the MXGP title in 2015, and for sure that has given him some extra motivation this year.







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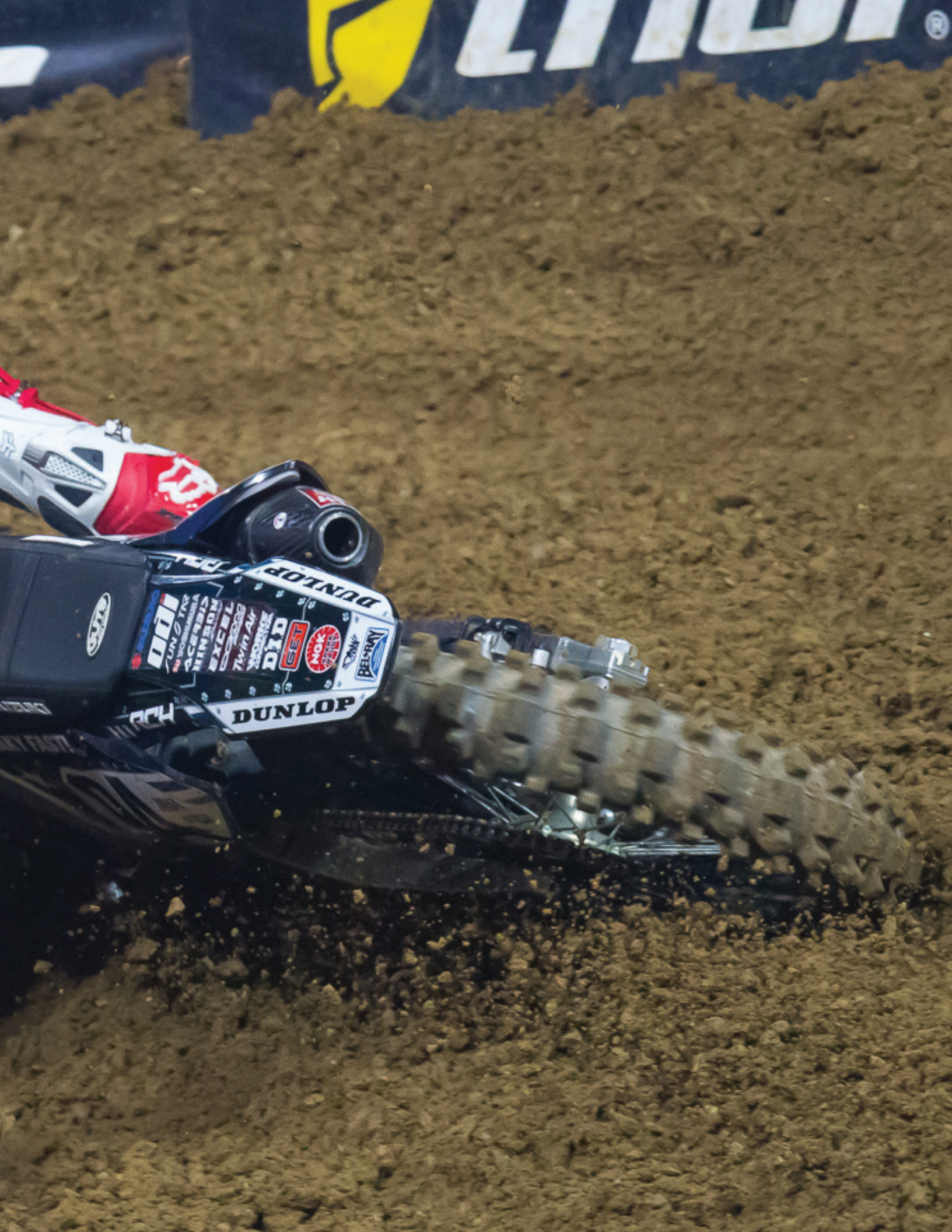
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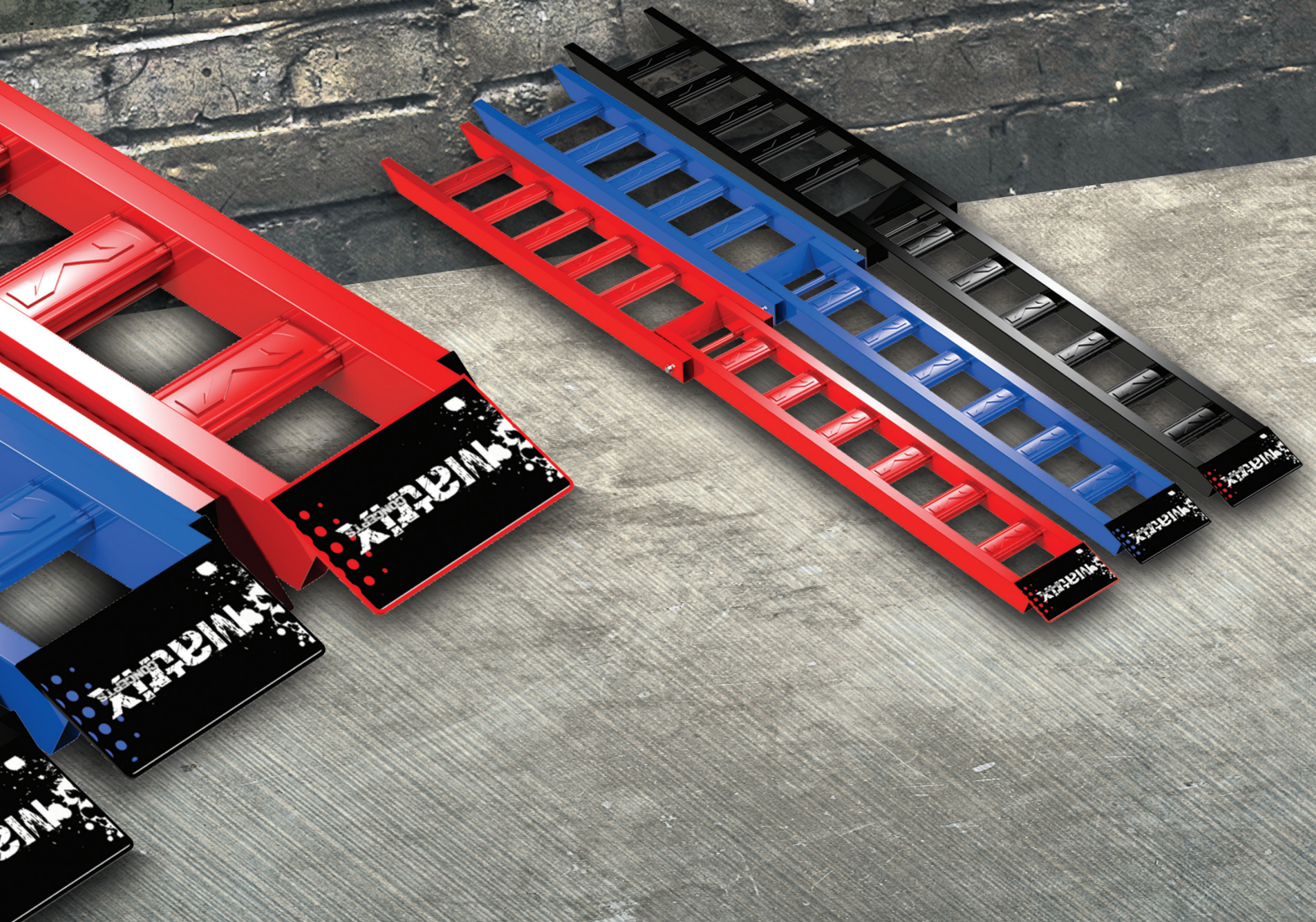


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# FASTEST MAN ON THE PLANET

Story Geoff Meyer images Acevedo J.P.

There are questions being raised after his stunning performances in the pre-season if Jeffrey Herlings isn't the fastest motocross rider in the world. He put together a masterclass at both the Hawkstone Park International and a week later in Valence in France. Beating not only his MX2 rivals, but also a long list of leading MXGP riders. We caught up with him and asked him about his pre-season.









**Motocross Illustrated:** Jeffrey, it's been a pretty decent pre-season hasn't it?

**Herlings:** Well, we started off in Sardinia, and it was my first race in like six months and it was hard to get used to the racing feeling again. We dominated MX2 around there, but then in the superfinal, I had a bad start and the track was up-hills, so passing the 450s wasn't easy. I started in mid-pack and made my way to fourth or something like that.

**Motocross Illustrated:** The last two races you have really dominated.

**Herlings:** Yes, it's been really good. Obviously I won all three moto's in Hawkstone, including the superfinal, and then did it in Valence again last weekend. So it's getting better and better and everything is positive and I can't wait for the gate to drop in Qatar. It's been more than two years that I can actually say I am 100% on the bike and now it's the first time in three years I had a perfect winter training.

**Motocross Illustrated:** How do you feel compare to other periods of your career, when you have also been 100% fit?

**Herlings:** I think in the middle of 2014 I was really in good shape, mid-season and I felt strong. I am not at the same pace right now, but I don't need to be there yet, it's a six-month season and I can build to that. I think it is important to keep improving and that is what we are working for. I feel strong already and speed wise I am showing I am the fastest guy in MX2 and even though we didn't run a GP yet, the guys like Anstie, Tonkov and others were there, two big names in the class and only Ferrandis is missing. I feel strong and can't wait for the Qatar race.

**Motocross Illustrated:** What has changed for you since your injuries?

**Herlings:** I have changed my way of thinking. Three years ago I didn't have any fears, I was just hitting the throttle wide open, and whatever will happen will happen. Now I am more playing it safe and taking my time more, and try and avoid risk or injury. A couple of years ago I was wide open and see how it ended. Also in my head I did everything I could to be ready for the season. We had a perfect winter preparation so far. When I am on the gate in Qatar I















can honestly say I did everything I could to be ready and whatever the result will be we take it from there.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Beating the top MXGP guys like Desalle, Simpson and Townley, does that give any regrets in not moving up to the MXGP class this year?

**Herlings:** I mean, when we made the decision three months ago it wasn't even sure when I would be back on the bike. It could have been end of November, but it could have been end of December, or even January, we didn't know. We are lucky everything went well and we started riding early. I don't know, I have mixed feelings, but I don't have any regrets on my decision, and it's a good decision for my confidence, to still do another year in MX2. MX2 is easier, there are so many heavy hitters in MXGP, but it isn't the easy way out, because there is no easy way to win a world motocross championship, be it MX2 or MXGP, but of course it's easier to win the MX2 than the MXGP, but it still isn't easy.

**Motocross Illustrated:** I read in the Suzuki press release you had a coming together with Ben Townley. Can you explain what happened?

**Herlings:** You know the Valence track, it's hard, slick, one lined and hard to overtake, so if you do want to overtake you need to make an aggressive pass. From my side I didn't even touch him, it was a 180 turn, he went on the outside I went on the inside and I just braked so he couldn't turn, then he tipped over into the mud and corner actually, and I heard he hit his knee. If I did hit him I am sorry, he is a friend of mine and we didn't speak afterwards, but as I said, from what I know I didn't touch him and if I did it was at really low speed, and I think everything will be alright.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Last question, I saw you will support your National championship. It's got a new name, the dates don't clash with the GP races and the prizemoney is better. It all sounds like positive changes?

**Herlings:** I think the National championships are still important. We have a busy schedule with the GP races, but I still try and do some races in Holland. I think it's important to do the maximum I can do. The first three I will do and then see what I do after that. I want to race for my Dutch fans because I know they can't fly to Qatar or Thailand.







# Top Riders Piston's Choice



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**Jeremy  
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**Jordi  
Tixier**  
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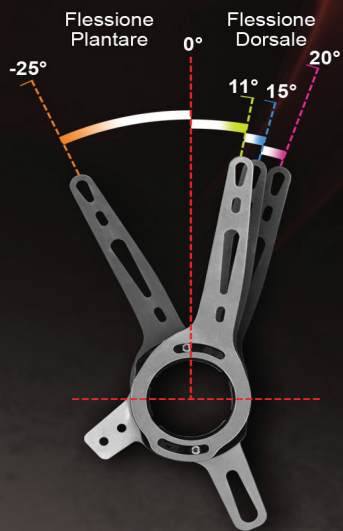


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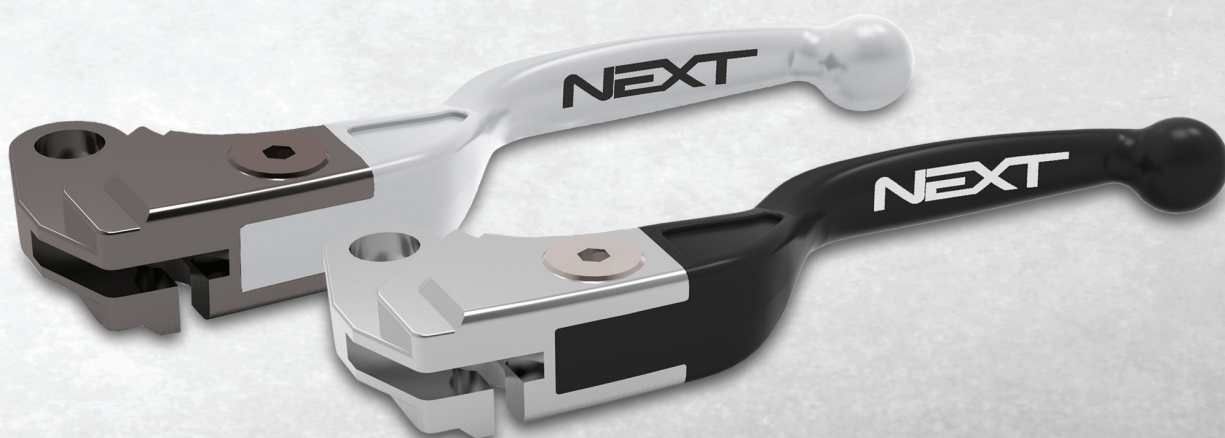
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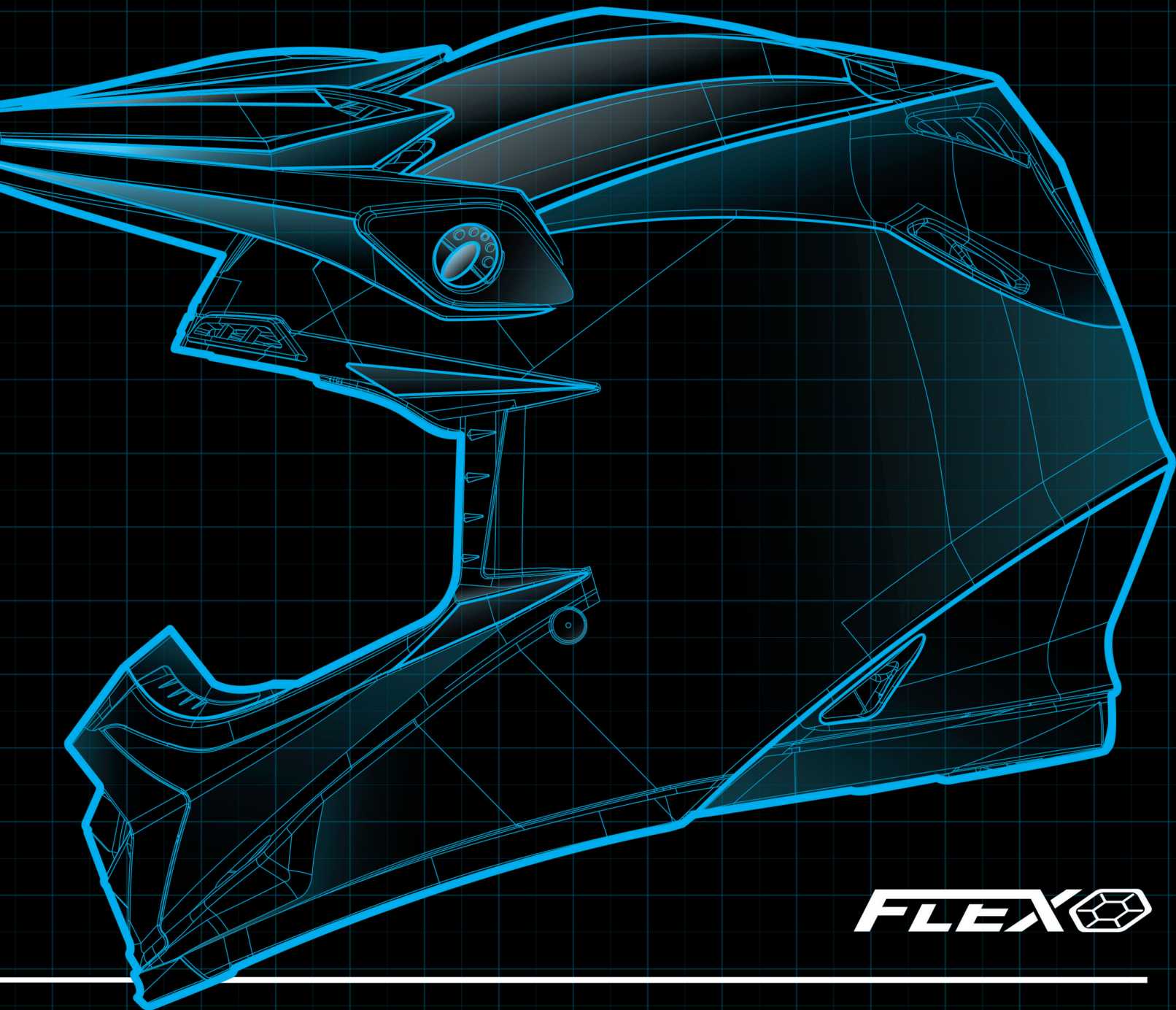


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